

Media Strategy and Place Branding in the Transnational European Öresund Region

Estrategia de medios y *place branding* en la region transnacional europea de Öresund

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Abstract

The aim is firstly to present a conceptual discussion about the relationship between media strategies and place branding, media effects and relations between sources and journalists. Second, based on a case study of the European transnational Öresund region (Danish-Swedish) the aim is to describe and analyze a contemporary agenda-building, media service-oriented place branding strategy.

The empirical case consists of a descriptive study of Öresund Media Platform, an EU Interreg project (2012-2014). A content analysis of how the news press in the Öresund Region has reported on Öresund place issues 2002-2012 is presented.

Earlier research questions direct media effects and describes the relationship between organizations and media as a power struggle. The interactive and digital media development in combination with changing relations between sources and journalists has created a new media landscape. Uni-directional media strategies may still be relevant, but strategies adapted to the contemporary organizational processes of media organizations are becoming more relevant. The media-service approach, focusing agenda-building using semi-independent news agencies is an example of a new branding media strategy.

This paper is as an example of a public relations and media studies approach to place branding. The case study describes an innovative city and place branding strategy, founded in the contemporary media development in a transnational European region.

Keywords: Media Strategy, Öresund Region, Place Branding, Media Relations

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Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es en primer lugar presentar una discusión conceptual sobre la relación entre las estrategias de comunicación y *place branding*, los efectos en los medios y las relaciones entre las fuentes y los periodistas. En segundo lugar el objetivo es, sobre la base de un estudio de caso de la región transnacional Europea de Öresund (danesa-sueca), describir y analizar la construcción de la agenda actual, orientada a servicios multimedia en lugar de a la estrategia de marca.

El caso empírico consiste en el estudio descriptivo de Öresund Media Platform, un proyecto interregional de la UE (2012-2014). Se presenta un análisis de contenido de las noticias publicadas en la región de Öresund para ver qué asuntos se han empleado para informar sobre Öresund durante el periodo 2002-2012.

Las preguntas de investigación se centran en los efectos de los medios directos y describe la relación entre las organizaciones y los medios de comunicación como una lucha de poder. El desarrollo de los medios interactivos y digitales en combinación con el cambio de las relaciones entre las fuentes y los periodistas ha creado un nuevo panorama de los medios. Estrategias de medios unidireccionales todavía pueden ser relevantes, pero las estrategias adaptadas a los procesos organizacionales actuales de los medios de comunicación son cada vez más relevante. El enfoque de servicio a los medios de comunicación, centrándose en la construcción de la agenda usando agencias de noticias semi-independientes es un ejemplo de una nueva estrategia de marca en los medios.

Este trabajo es un ejemplo de un enfoque basado en las relaciones públicas y los estudios de medios de comunicación para mejorar la marca. El estudio de caso describe una estrategia innovadora de marca-ciudad, basada en el desarrollo actual de los medios en una región europea transnacional.

Palabras clave: Estrategia de medios, región de Öresund, Place Branding, relaciones con los medios

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1. INTRODUCTION

Place branding is a growing industry and research field that took off in the 1990s as a consequence of increased place competition and scientific, commercial and political acknowledge of the growing service economy (Skinner, 2008). As in other new scientific fields of knowledge, place branding is struggling with its identity in the academic realm. In one of many literature reviews on place marketing and branding, (Gertner, 2011) found a dominance of qualitative, multi-disciplinary, descriptive and disparate case studies based on minor empirical studies. Gertner (2011:101) critically concludes that the field is in need of unification, testing of models, and development of “robust theory”. In another review, focusing city branding, (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011:22) also found a high degree of multi-disciplinarity and theoretical fragmentation in a rapidly growing field, but do not argue for increased unification: “What we propose, however, is not essentially more rigorous research, but rather research based on alternative and critical approaches that focus on the political, aesthetical, and ethical implications (...)”. This article may, hopefully, be viewed as an example of the alternative approach to place branding, based in public relations and media studies, two research fields that so far has been rather unexplored in place branding studies. The role of media is of course acknowledged in earlier research, especially regarding nation branding and public diplomacy: “Mass media, in this case, forms a very powerful tool that can greatly enhance or severely impeach the reputation (and brand) of any country” (Freeman & Nguyen Nhung, 2012, p. 160). But the theory that is used is traditonally based in a marketing or tourism approach, not taking into account media and communication theory. There are also few links to the field of public relations or strategic communication, in other words organizations targeted communication aiming to defend, create or enhance organizational legitimacy to operate on different markets and societies (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007). An exception is Kavaratzis (2004) who has developed a communicative framework for place branding, and described journalism about cities as a relevant but unintentional form of communication that’s is hard to manage from a branding perspective.

The aim of this paper is two-fold. First, the aim is to present a conceptual discussion on earlier research about the relationship between media strategies and place branding, media

effects and relations between sources and journalists. Second, based on a case study, the aim is to describe and analyze a new form of agenda-building media strategy for place branding, based in the contemporary media and communications development.

Öresund Media Platform, which is the main empirical case, is used to illustrate a semi-journalistic, agenda-building and service-oriented strategy. The Öresund Media Platform, an EU-supported independent news agency in Malmö, Sweden and Copenhagen, Denmark, aims to increase media coverage about the region and the main cities.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Mediatization and Branding

The role of the media in social, economic, political and cultural processes has received increasing attention over the past decades. The mediatization of society is an integral part of the development of modern and late modern society, where the production and distribution of symbolic products both influence and saturate communication flows and relationships between institutions, organizations and individuals (Thompson, 1995). While mass communication technologies (sender-oriented and uni-directional) dominated the development of modernity, digital and interactive technologies step-by-step have created communication flows that are more alike face-to-face communication flows. From a place branding approach, media strategies focusing uni-directional publicity in editorial media, by using traditional PR tactics such as press releases or press conferences, is still relevant but only as a part of a wider strategy taking the interactive and convergent development into account. The boundaries between public relations, marketing and other forms of promotion and advocacy has become increasingly unclear. Technological, substantive and cultural convergence is also the dominant trend since several years in the media industry (Falkheimer & Heide, 2013; Jenkins, 2006).

It is very difficult to draw any direct correlation between media exposure and influence. This is well-known by most marketers. Still many branding campaigns have a strong focus on advertising and add traditional PR tactics re-actively, following and not leading the advertising strategy, to get media coverage. But times are changing. Last years there has been increased interest in using social media for branding, sometimes by engaging people

outside to be “curators” and ambassadors. An example is a nation branding campaign, “Curators of Sweden”, where the Swedish governmental agency Visit Sweden let a citizen send tweets somehow linked to Sweden from the official national Twitter account. Another trend is to replace visible persuasion messages by messages investments in contexts not associated with advertising, so-called embedded marketing. An example of this is place brand exposure in feature film, television shows and other forms of media content. Place placements obviously have similarities to product placements, a growing form of marketing communication, but is also problematic in the same way. Soba & Aydin (2013:114) conclude that product placements “delivers a good return on investment and significantly increases brand awareness”, but also point out the risks of losing control, negative associations and ethical concerns. The effects of place placements is even more problematic considering all three critical aspects.

Drawing general conclusions about media effects based on earlier research is next to impossible, but some provisional truths that media scholars generally agree on may be conveyed. One of the oldest conclusions is that the media reinforces rather than changes people's perceptions and that opinion leaders have a crucial role in the formation of opinions (Lazarsfeld & Katz, 1955). Another truth that most research agree on is the basic conclusions in agenda setting theory: the media has an impact on what is being discussed but does not necessarily determine the outcome of these discussions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). On the other hand side, the media has strong framing effects, meaning that they define problems, responsibilities, and possible solutions (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

A final conclusion is that media coverage has a stronger attention effect when people know less and lack direct experience of something, e.g. a place.

The increased focus on the events can be seen as part of the contemporary communicative transformation. One of the key motivations behind organizing city, region or nation events is media coverage. The actors behind the events assume that the publicity of the place lead to attitudinal and behavioral effects, such as increasing the number of tourists, investors or inhabitants.

Traditional promotion methods, such as advertisements or brochures, are challenged in late modern society with increased fragmentarization, information overload and lack of trust. The stories that are communicated through journalism, events, entertainment shows and so on are viewed as having significantly greater impact on people's attitudes and actions compared to directly controlled presentations in the form of brochures or advertisements.

2.2. Media Relations and Strategies

Relationships or power games between professional sources and the news media received increased attention by European media researchers in the 1990s (Corner, 1993; Cottle, 2003). The research area has different names depending on perspective. In public relations the area is mostly named *media relations* (Coombs, 2010; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006) which emphasizes that it is an exchange relationship, rather than a power struggle. In media and political communication research, the concept *news management* (Manning, 2001) had a strong impact from the 1990s and on. News management may be defined as the strategies and tactics that professional sources use to create, manage, change or reinforce their perspectives and ideas through news journalism.

The long-dominant theory of Excellence in public relations (Grunig, 2001; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) shows a marginal interest in publicity issues. The four (and five) public relations models are based on a distinction between asymmetric and symmetric communication, where the normative goal is to create symmetrical relationships between organizations and their publics. The oldest form of public relations is called the publicity model and is viewed as one-way communication with similarities to propaganda. The publicity model lacks a truth objective, is only interested in media exposure and is completely unidirectional. In practice, this has given public relations bad reputation since it "(...) define public relations as the use of communication to manipulate publics for the benefit of organizations" (Grunig, 1989:18).

The main criterion determining if a person has a chance of becoming a news source is journalists assessment if he or she is credible (Reich, 2011). Case studies (Reich, 2005) show that interpersonal communication still has a crucial role when journalists interact with sources. (Manning, 2001) made an extensive study of news sources importance in Great Britain and attached particular importance to the organizational processes in media

corporations. Organizational drivers such as the desire to create security and control are crucial for the selection and use of sources. More specifically, two driving forces are mentioned: (1) the pressure to meet deadlines and to produce content that is news worthy (leading to that those with established power is given more space as they are considered more news worthy); (2) the need to be efficient and cost effective (which means that news agencies and other media are important sources).

Most of the earlier studies are based in research in a media context that differs from that of today. The previous context was dominated by traditional mass communication where professional journalists and professional sources had clearly defined roles. Media technology and distribution channels belonged to professional players. With the emergence of social and new media there has been a change. The line between public relations practitioners and journalists are no longer as clear as they were before. Periodically traditional media expose famous journalists who have chosen instead to work as press spokesmen for companies or governmental agencies. This is not new in itself, but it is possible that this trend has become even deeper (Journalists, 2011; Nygren, 2009). Two trends are evident in the statistics. First, the proportion of freelance journalists is increasing and more and more journalists are employed through staffing industry. The proportion of permanent staff journalists has decreased while the proportion of hired journalists has increased in recent years, this as part of the rationalization processes in media companies. It is inevitable that freelance journalists often work with both public relations and journalism. Based on the reduction of staff journalists, one can therefore assume that the line between journalism and media relations have become somewhat more vague.

From the professional perspective of the sources, new and social media has meant several changes. That said, with some caution. Emphasizing that the media right now are in a period of transition has been standard for a long time and could always lead to hasty conclusions. However, there is less doubt that there is an impact. The dyad that existed between journalists and professional sources has gradually evolved into a *triad*, where a third party - made up of individuals and different social groups that have not previously had access to either the media or distribution opportunities - become more important. The traditional tools of media relations, such as press conferences or press releases, are still used but there

are signs that new forms of communication challenge them. (Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2010:243) note that the one-way communications which dominated earlier news management and/or media relations is being replaced by “media catching”, i.e.: “rather than having practitioners contacting lots of journalists, broadcasters, and bloggers in hopes of gaining media placements, thousands of practitioners are being contacted at one time by journalists and others seeking specific material for stories, blog postings, and Web sites with upcoming deadlines”.

The professional sources that are most successful with “media catching” are those who are best at delivering services that creates value for journalists. Maybe we are entering a new phase. The first phase was *publicity hunting*, through more or less spectacular efforts, to create media coverage. In the second phase a *fairly stable relationship system* was created where the sources applied classic media tactics such as press conferences or sending press releases to journalists. The possible third phase is a *media service era*, where journalists are viewed as customers in a fast market. The media service approach is evident in the case that will be described now.

3. METHODOLOGY

The empirical case consists of a descriptive study of Öresund Media Platform, an EU Interreg project (2012-2014). A content analysis of how the news press in the Öresund Region has reported on Öresund place issues 2002-2012 is presented.

3.1. Case Study: Öresund Media Platform

The aim of the Øresund Media Platform is to promote increased integration within everyday Øresund region through innovative journalistic practices that increase the general knowledge of the cross-border development in the Öresund Region. The target group is hardly a target group at all: the Swedish and Danish public. From a place branding approach the project is quite different, since the focus is internal (creating attention, interest and legitimacy among inhabitants), semi-journalistic (on the one hand side funded by the EU and by cities or municipalities in the Öresund region of Denmark and Sweden, on the other side not influencing the journalistic selection of topics or angles). The project is divided into two parts: (1) Öresund Media Studies where Danish and Swedish researchers analyze media

coverage of the cross-border development in the Øresund region. Knowledge gained from these studies is supposed to develop the journalistic working methods of the production-oriented part of the project and help to develop existing media practices. (2) Öresund News, a news agency aiming to increase coverage of the Öresund Region (Denmark in Sweden, Sweden in Denmark) in established news papers, TV, radio and social media.

As a background I will shortly present the Öresund region. After this I will present Öresund News agency, as an example of an innovative media strategy.

The Öresund region

The Öresund bridge physically connected two nations that had been separated since the south of contemporary Sweden was conquered from Denmark in 1658. The Öresund bridge was surrounded by high expectations, e.g. “as a social experiment and a testing ground for cultural integration within the European Union, a model for the new Europe without borders” (Berg, 2000, p. 8). The Öresund region is recognized as a cross-border region in the European Union, has 3.8 million inhabitants and strong business clusters in e.g. ICT, medical technology and tourism. The main city is Copenhagen, capital of Denmark, situated opposite Malmö in Sweden, a former industrial town that has transformed into a knowledge-intensive city since the 1990s.

A main argument behind the investment in a bridge was economical. The connection between Denmark and Sweden was supposed to lead to increased economic prosperity due to better logistical mobility and synergies that new corporate collaborations would lead to. Another main argument was cultural-communicative. There was a strong belief, from several actors and institutions that the physical connection would lead to the development of a transnational identity and a common Danish-Swedish public sphere. Regional governmental actors hired public relations and advertising agencies for creating a common brand and identity for the Öresund Region (Falkheimer, 2004). From 2000 and on the Öresund Committee branded the region as “Öresund: The Human Capital”, created a branding organization (Öresund Identity Network) and launched different promotional activities. The branding organization was dismantled after some years and the promotional activities were minimized. The main reason was that the effects of the brand strategy were weak. The

Öresund identity was “(...) artificially created by a group of politicians and does not reflect the feeling the majority of the inhabitants have: most feel still Danes and Swedish in the first place rather than residents from the Euregion of the Öresund” (Hospers, 2006:1028).

The mobility between Denmark and Sweden increased a lot and the number of Swedes working in Denmark and the other way around increased more than 400 per cent 2000-2013, even if this development has slowed down since 2008 due to the financial recession.² But the cultural integration and the creation of a common brand have not been as successful and is still a debated topic in research, business and politics. The trend last years has been that the main cities in the Öresund Region, Copenhagen and Malmö, have started to brand the two cities (as twin cities) and left the regional approach. This has led to criticism from minor cities in the region.

3.2. Content analysis

A media analysis was made as a part of the project, based on a content analysis of internet news articles that deal with the Øresund Region during week 46 every year in Swedish and Danish newspapers (and a TV-news station) during 2002-2012. The analysis of week 46 (an ordinary news week) is based in earlier news media research methodology in Denmark and Sweden (Lund, 2001). Overall, the analysis covers 695 Swedish news articles and 687 Danish news articles during 2002-2012 in three newspapers in the South of Sweden and five news papers and one TV-news station in Denmark (but only from 2007).

4. FINDINGS

The total amount of chosen news media are higher in Denmark than in Sweden, so the first conclusion is that the media coverage of Öresund regional issues is larger in Sweden than in Denmark.

1. Media reporting about the Øresund Region has decreased since 2007 in both countries. A peak in reporting was visible in 2004 while in 2012 there were fewer articles than any other year. The decrease of media coverage follows the economical recession.

² <http://www.oresundskomiteen.org/hem/oresundsfakta/>

2. The reporting is dominated by so-called routine and service journalism. Routine journalism is journalism, where the journalist reports from events that are orchestrated by an external source. Service journalism consists mostly of raw material from press releases, reports and so on, not processed or analyzed by other sources. During the whole period 2002-2012 there is very little focus journalism where editors have given priority to write independently or in depth about the Öresund region.
3. The issue that dominates the media coverage of the Öresund region is culture and entertainment, which, however, also has less exposure in recent years. Second, the reporting is dominated by news about crime and accidents. This is similar in Denmark and Sweden. Business, education, research, environment, health, lifestyle and other issues are given minimal space.
4. The representation of different actors varies a lot depending on the issue that dominates. Politicians dominate the election but are also quite frequent in reporting overall, especially in Sweden. Citizens are also visible, as well as celebrities and artists. But the representation of citizens is mainly linked to news about crime. The business community is more visible in Danish than in Swedish news media.
5. The reporting in both countries is dominated by simple details or information on what is happening on the "other side". More serious articles, creating knowledge or a sense of regional identity, are not common.

From an integration perspective, news media is believed to contribute constructively to the development of the region and its cities. But the content analysis shows that the media coverage on both sides of the Öresund region is minor, mainly focused on service- and routine journalism, dominated by simple news about culture, crimes and accidents. From a qualitative perspective, news journalism in both countries is linked to a national and local paradigm, not a transnational regional dimension. National stereotypes are prevalent in both Danish and Swedish news media. The regionality that is portrayed in Denmark and Sweden is very shallow and can not in the last ten years be considered as contributing to an increased interest in the integration or exchange process.

The national framework is, as mentioned, dominating and the transnational region of Öresund has almost no visibility in the traditional media. The idea of late modern society,

“(...) recognized for their mobile and fluid identities” (Felgenhauer, 2010:77) does not manifest itself in the news media that were analyzed.

A Media Service Approach: Öresund News

Öresund News was launched as a regional news agency project in 2011. The news agency produces independent journalism but the selection of news is done with an explicit agenda-building strategy (Botan & Hazleton, 1989; Zoch, 2006): increasing news about the region and its cities. In this way the news agency is converging traditional journalism and public relations. The news are distributed free to news papers and other established journalistic channels in Sweden and Denmark. Öresund Media Platform provides a platform for a cost effective and co-financed production of Öresund journalism by an open source thinking.

The journalists working for the agency were selected because of their prior experience and knowledge on Öresund regional issues, business and political journalism. Following the development in the media industry as well as the service-oriented media strategy approach mentioned in the theoretical review, the news agency distribute news free to news papers and other established journalistic channels in Sweden and Denmark. During the first phase of the EU Interreg project the journalistic project leader for Öresund Media Platform presented the news service agency to editors at different media organizations to emphasize that even if the agency is an interest-financed project, the news production is professional and independent in all other ways, except that it focus on transnational Öresund issues. The arguments for publishing the news (directly or re-written) in Swedish and Danish news papers were partly that there is a public interest in Öresund news, partly that the news agency in fact fit well with the driving forces in news management, following the reasoning by (Manning, 2001): (1) the pressure to meet deadlines and to produce content that is news worthy; (2) the need to be efficient and cost effective (which means that news agencies and other media are important sources).

The Öresund News agency has produced and distributed news since the fall 2012, and the project may already be regarded as a success from a cross-border place branding perspective. During the first year news produced and distributed by the news agency has led

to massive further publication in Danish and Swedish news media. The agency has also launched an image data bank at Flickr that is well used by journalists.

The increased media exposure of news about the Öresund region linked to the Öresund Media Platform is clear but we cannot make any conclusions about the wider effects on regionalization or place branding. It must be said that the focus on media content is not enough to draw conclusions about how the public is influenced by the news coverage. But one assumption is that increased media coverage has an agenda-building effect, i.e. that it leads to a public discussion about the possibilities of increased regionalization and collaboration.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The focus in this article has been media strategies for place branding, using a media and public relations perspective. Earlier research in place branding has shown interest in media issues, but mainly from a marketing perspective. The aim of the article was to present a limited review on earlier research about the relationship between media strategies and place branding, media effects and relations between sources and journalists. Another aim was to describe and analyze different media strategies. Earlier research questions the idea of direct media effects and describes the relationship between organizations and media as a power struggle, in constant transistion. The interactive and digital media development in combination with changing relations between sources and journalists has created a new media landscape. Uni-directional media strategies using traditional PR tactics may still be relevant, but strategies adapted to the organizational structures of media organizations are becoming more relevant. The media-service approach, focusing agenda-building where semi-independent news agencies are used (respecting journalistic ethics) is viewed as an example of a new media strategy. For place branding this strategy obviously means less control over mediated city brands, but the question is if the process of city or place branding through journalism ever has been controlled. The limited review on media relations and news management research shows the need for more research in this area, integrating place branding, media and public relations research.

The case study describes a media service-oriented strategy used for increasing public attention and interest in the Danish-Swedish Öresund Region and its cities. The media analysis presented in this paper shows that the increased European interest in transnational regionalization has not, in the case of the Öresund region, led to increased transnational news journalism 2002-2012. The Öresund Media Platform and the news agency Öresund News may be a new media strategy to apply also for other transnational city-regions, aiming to increase media coverage not through traditional publicity tactics, but through legitimate and agenda-building journalism.

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